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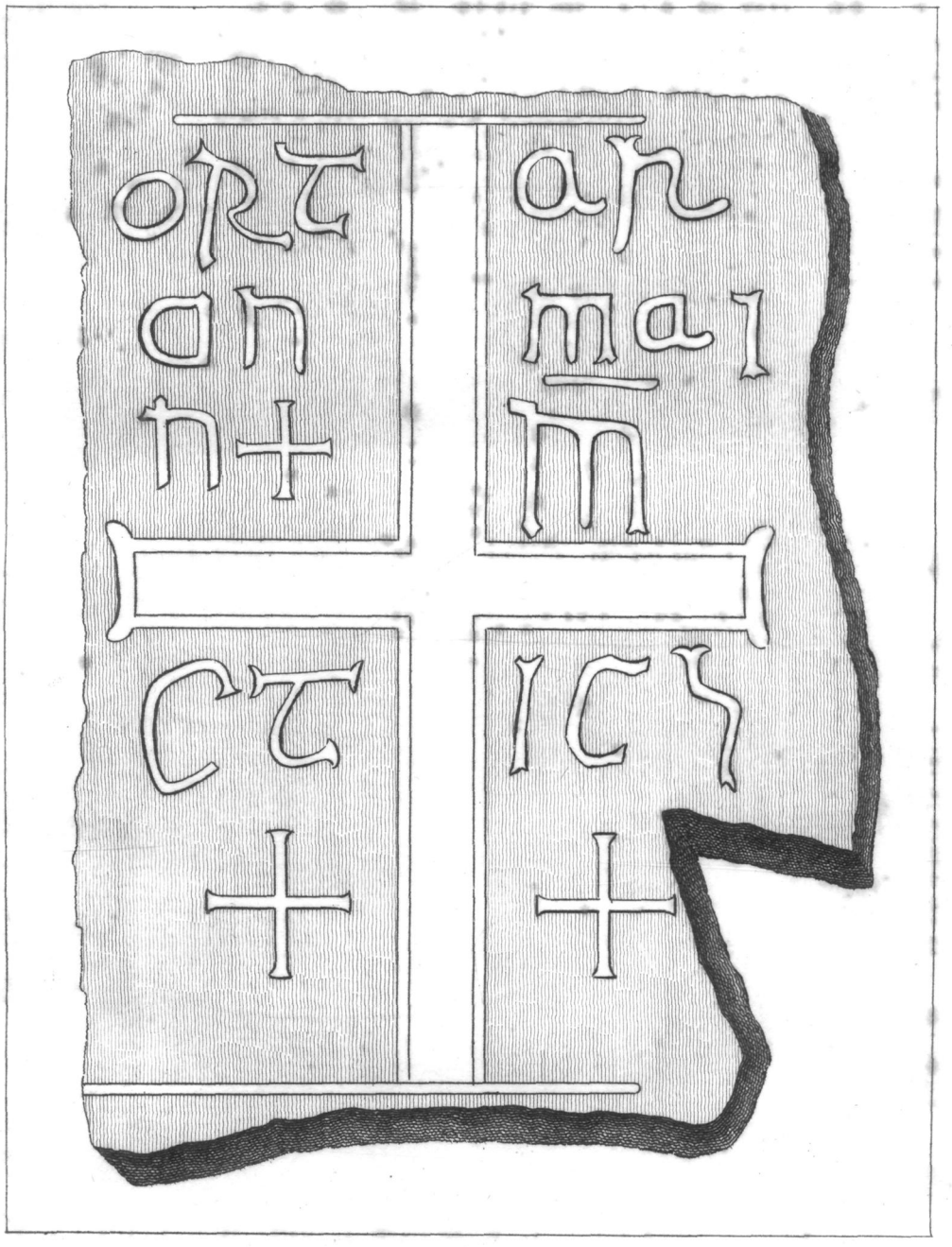

AN INSCRIPTION *on an ancient ſepulchral Stone or Monument in the Church-yard of* KILLCUMMIN, *near* KILLALLA, *in the County of Mayo; with ſome Remarks on the ſame. By the Rev.* JAMES LITTLE.—*Read June 21ſt*, 1802.

A PERSUASION of the antiquity of this monument, and of its affording ſome evidence as to the progreſs of the arts in this kingdom in the middle ages, induced me to make a draught of the ſtone, and of the characters inſcribed on it; as in the annexed ſcheme: which is as faithfully delineated, as could well be done by a perſon unſkilled in the art of drawing, and not having the help of a pantograph for that purpoſe. The characters on it are, however, repreſented, as to their relative ſize, ſhape, and poſition, with an accuracy fully ſufficient for their being underſtood and decyphered; becauſe, from the hardneſs and durability of the ſtone, (which is a grit or freeſtone), on which they are largely and judiciouſly engraved, ſulcated or *en creux*, as it is called, they remain now as diſtinct and legible as they ever were.

The ſtone is reputed among the country people in the neighbourhood, to be of an antiquity reaching beyond any oral tradition, farther than its being the monument of Saint Commyn, from whom they ſuppoſe the church and pariſh to be denominated, and who was there interred; and as ſuch it is by them regarded with peculiar veneration.

Though I leave to others the taſk of explaining the inſcription, for which few perſons are leſs qualified than I am, I muſt yet beg leave

to offer my own conjecture about the meaning of it; becauſe it is from hence I am inclined to think it worth a deſcription.

I ſuppoſe then that the characters are to be read, not regularly in each of the four compartments, in the ſtone ſeparately, not yet in lines acroſs the adjoining compartments laterally, but by alternate couplets of lines on each ſide, in the following order, viz.

O R T — *a p*
*m a I*
*a n*
*n* ✠ — *m*
I C §
C T

And I underſtand them to denote as follows:

Obiit R T (Ricardus vel Rodericus, &c. Toole vel Teigue, &c.)
*Allæ (i. e. Killallæ) Princeps. Maii 1mo.
ANNo + (Crucis) Milleſimo 1mo Centeſimo § (i. e. ſecundo vel quinto).

The letters *a p*, which are here ſuppoſed to mean Allæ princeps, ſhould perhaps be rendered Allæ præcentor or prebendarius, and may have belonged to the Saint, who might have been the præcentor, or a prebendary of the chapter of the ſee of Killallæ,† and the initials of his real name beeu R. T; and he might have afterward received the name of Commyn from the church of Killcummin in which he officiated: and then the inſcription may run (in Engliſh) thus,

" Died

* The Latin name of Killalla is Alla, or rather Aladia.

† One of the prebends of the ſee is called Ardagh (Ardagia.)

" Died R. T. (ſuppoſe Ricard or Roderic Toole or Teigue, &c.) prince (or precentor) of Killalla, on May the 1ſt, in the year of the Croſs 1102."

The letters C. T. I ſuppoſe to be the initials of the name of the ſon or ſucceſſor of R. T. who erected the monument to the memory of the latter. Theſe four only are capital letters.

There is a piece broken from the lower part of the ſtone; but it is evident there were never any characters inſcribed on it.

Now whatever doubt may be entertained as to the meaning of the reſt of the inſcription, I think there can be none as to the date, excepting in the laſt figure or mark §, which I take to be the Arabic numeral character or figure 2, or perhaps 5: and I am induced to think ſo, for theſe reaſons.

1. It is not a letter of the Roman alphabet, as all others in the inſcription are, the date excepted; and one cannot, in this inſtance, ſuppoſe a mixture of Greek and Roman letters.

2. It reſembles moſt the antique form of the figure 2, among the Arabic characters, which the learned Doctor Wallis gives us in his hiſtory of Algebra, chap. 3d. as written in the manuſcripts of *Johannes a ſacro Boſco*, and other writers in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries.

3. The character I, after the letters *m*ᶜ *a*, and alſo that before the letter C, in the upper and lower compartments, on the right hand rather reſemble the form of the figure 1, than that of the Roman letter I.

4. Doctor Wallis has, (in the place above quoted), produced inſtances, ſhewing that about the time of the firſt introduction of the Saracenic numeral characters into theſe countries, it was not unuſual in manuſcripts, to write the dates partly in literal, and partly in numeral characters, as is done here.

Before the art of printing had afforded a model for the ſhape of letters, there was a licence for that variety in the form of them, (as in manuſcripts), which is obſervable in ſome of the letters here: our ſculptor hath accordingly diſplayed ſuch fancy in this reſpect, as ſhews him

him to have been well acquainted with the faſhion of writing, i. e. to have been a literate perſon; and the reader will perhaps be more diſpoſed to acquieſce in his fantaſtical diſpoſition of the lines in the inſcription, as I have ſuppoſed the order of them; if he can, in this inſtance, as well as in that of the mixture of literal and numeral characters, bring himſelf to think with Doctor Wallis, "That this doth rather favour the ſimplicity of that age, not very nice in ſuch things eſpecially amongſt the mechanics), than any deſign of impoſture." See Lowthorp's Abridgment of Phil. Tranſ. Vol. 1ſt, p. 108.

Unleſs, therefore, I am miſtaken in this explication of the monument, it affords evidence of the higheſt kind, to prove: firſt, that in the eleventh century, and before any Engliſh colony had ſettled in Ireland, there were there many perſons, not only of the clergy, (who, in thoſe days, were not ſtone-cutters), but alſo of the lower order of mechanics, to whom letters were familiar; for it is hardly to be ſuppoſed that an epitaph would be written in a language very generally unknown. And ſecondly, that the revival of letters and the arts commenced at leaſt as early in this country, as in any other of Weſtern Europe, Spain excepted: ſeeing that the Arabic numeral characters were received here from the Moors in Spain, ſooner than perhaps any where elſe; for Doctor Wallis, who endeavours to prove, in oppoſition to the opinion of Voſſius,* and the literati on the continent, that theſe characters came into uſe in England, before the thirteenth century; is obliged to refer to the manuſcript writings of ſome individuals, in ſupport of this; and could hear of no inſcription, containing ſuch characters, except one in a private houſe, with the date 1133. A monument is indeed mentioned in the above-cited place in the Phil. Tranſ. to have the characters 1090, engraven on it: but it is ambiguous, not only as being ſimply a date without an inſcription, and having the form of the characters different from thoſe then uſed; but alſo as being perhaps intended like the former, for the information and ſatisfaction of the ſingle family to which it

* See Voſſius de Scientiis, Math. c. 8. pag. 34: Ed. Amſt.

it belonged, and not for general uſe and inſtruction, which, perhaps, it could not anſwer, as being generally unintelligible. So that the monument I am deſcribing may be the oldeſt extant deſigned for *public* reading, on which the numeral characters are inſcribed, as being commonly known and in uſe.

But ſhould the reader reject this explication of the figure or mark in queſtion, and ſuppoſe it to be the Greek numeral letter ϟ ſanpi, often written like the Hebrew ץ, and uſed to denote the number 90, (according to which, the date of the inſcription would be 1190); this would indicate a yet higher degree of literature in this country, at that period, as ſhewing an acquaintance not only with Greek, as well as Latin letters, but alſo with the mathematical uſes of the former in computation. The learning of a people is improperly eſtimated by magnificent monuments of the arts; which ariſe from the opulence and luxury, produced by commerce: but letters are independent on theſe, and may have been highly cultivated here; though, as happened to other nations, (for inſtance the Carthaginians), war and revolutions, in deſtroying books, deſtroyed all veſtiges of learning. If ſumptuous edifices and ſculptures are to be made the criterion of a nation's proficiency in ſcience, it may be hereafter ſuppoſed, that the modern Scotch were an ignorant people, and the ancient Palmyrenians the moſt learned of nations.

Longinus declares the contrary; and the thing is ſo remote from fact, that we are directed to adopt a different opinion; that luxury, and ſavage ruſticity are equally unfavourable to learning and genuine civilization: men being, in both theſe ſtates of ſociety, alike occupied with purſuits and amuſements, which have no relation to ſtudy and intellectual attainments.